

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

Play-Acting in the Schools a Vital Need—A New Way to Make Heroes.

By Henrietta Rodman.

WHEN I took part in school plays other girls were always given the heroines' parts because they had small, straight noses and curly hair.

But since the Educational Dramatic League has entered the schools the homeliest girl has a chance to play Portia or Titania.

"Of course, we may spoil the play," said Miss Catherine Turner, the executive secretary of the league, "but we develop the girl."

"We believe that the desire to act is a perfectly wholesome impulse in most young people. So far as we are able we give the children a chance to act the parts that appeal to them."

"The little girl who plays self-confident Portia is realizing a dream and is being helped to develop a quality she needs."

"But," I objected, "most of the little girls want to play romantic parts, don't they? They read Chambers, you know, and they tie their hair ribbons to be fascinating."

"That's a natural impulse, too, but what are we to do about it? All our great-grandmothers were marrying at fifteen or so and taking up great social responsibilities as wives and mothers."

"The development of civilization has lifted the burden of responsibility from young girls. Marriages are being deferred till women are adult, but what are we to do with the tremendous development of emotion which comes in adolescence, the impulse toward mating, on which society is built? How are we to deal with this force between fifteen and twenty-five? Can your league offer to the schools any better medium for the expression of emotion than algebra or physics?"

"I think we can," Miss Turner smiled. "I believe that the drama is the best possible medium. I believe that girls and boys are inspired to noble living by acting great parts. If—and this is a point of great importance—if they can understand them."

"The chief difficulty which we encounter in our work is to find plays which the children can understand. Most of the great dramas are beyond their power to grasp. But as this work with young people develops plays will be written especially for them—really great plays, but simple ones."

"Plays are being read in the English classes of schools and colleges. We believe that before long there will be regularly organized departments for dramatics in which these plays, instead of being read, will be acted. The league has a training class for teachers who wish to become directors of dramatics."

To the end that every little girl may play at being a queen or a fairy, and every little boy an Indian or a knight, it is a pleasant idea, and, I believe, a very wise one.

"Why didn't you say something particular about the training school for community center workers?" demanded a little rich girl, who has been leading a suffrage club in a community center.

"Don't you know that community centers are bringing together all the people to discuss their problems and find out how to solve them?"

"I did say that," I protested.

"But you didn't say that lots of people like me who have never really felt the community at all—only a few people that we met at our friends' houses—we are getting our first chance to know all kinds of people, to work with them—not as upstarts but just people. That's what the community centers give Fifth Avenue people and First Avenue people—the opportunity to come together and discuss our common problems—we women, our need for the vote—men and women, the need for a better city and a fairer chance for everybody to get on."

"But what about the Training School for Community Center Workers? Why are you so interested in that?" I asked.

"Because those of us who have time want to do a little more than meet with the groups. We want to help form them."

"We go around among the people of the neighborhood and tell them that their school buildings are open to them after school hours; that husbands and wives can come together, and bring the children if they want to. There are clubs for all."

"If the father is a pushcart pedler he can meet other pedlars and representatives of the city government and help come to an agreement. Mother can join a suffrage club or a sewing club, if she chooses, or they can go together to a concert or a play."

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Upon the Democracy of the Women in Europe Will Depend the Real Settlement of European Peace.

The Grandniece of Robert E. Lee, Who Knows the Bitter Waste of Southern Reconstruction, Makes the Point.

By SARAH ADDINGTON.

THE EUROPEAN woman after the war will be in much the same position as was the American woman after our Civil War. And from the Southern woman of the United States she may learn a valuable lesson of what not to do. For it was the Southern women who made reconstruction in her berided land so difficult; it was they who held fast to Southern tradition, who clung to aristocracy, who preserved rancor and hatred and blocked democracy, new life and progress. Men and commerce in the South were democratic, but their wives and their homes were entirely opposed to the new order.

This is the opinion of Miss Betty Lee, grandniece of General Robert E. Lee, cousin of the oratorical Patrick Henry and, according to her statement, "Southern to the backbone and completely Northernized." By way of a living she is a professional entertainer among smart people and headed for the musical comedy stage—not the indolent, ever-engaged Southern girl of yesterday.

"Yes," she repeated, "the Southern women are responsible for just that slowness and hopelessness in the rebuilding of the South that has been close on to failure so often. But, oh, they are changing vastly now. This is the reconstruction period for the Southern woman. And yet she hasn't been commercialized."

"Her men have worshipped her. She must not touch the hem of the garment of business; that would be pollution, desecration. She mustn't get her hands tanned or her nose freckled; she must be a beautiful doll."

But the new Southern girl has taken her place, the girl who is coming North to school, who spends her summers campaigning for suffrage, who enters business and professions in cold, heartless New York. But, really, the woman's clubs are doing wonders down South; suffrage is working miracles. The girls are seeing that new life and activity are worth more than all their aristocratic society and old families put together. They are seeing that red blood is quite more fun than blue blood." She giggled sofly.

"Dear me, though, how horrified is the generation of managing mammas. I, for instance, a stage person—horror! Hands up, bated breath, unmentionable! But the Southern girls understand it. They feel as I do, that New York and the North mean freedom. Oh, I love the get-up-and-go, the snap and go and hustle and 'pep' of the North, where what you are depends upon what you do, and not upon what you once were. What good do my ancestors do me now, I ask you?" She snapped her fingers, laughing wickedly, this daughter of Southern heroes.

"The war's over. I can't live on Uncle Robert's reputation, can I? No. I have to get out and move around. But my friends would have me a Southern lady, with nice white hands and a nice rich husband."

"I so perfectly love my work that I'd brave anything for it, anyhow. And I have almost. New York's really a hard place, you know. The girl who works knows that. But, believe me, I'd rather be working and trying and hanging around down South having a man ask me if the moon isn't lovely, if the moon isn't charming—in fact, if the moon isn't exquisite."

"Southern girls don't like the tango type of man, usually. They like strength in their men just as all other girls do. But they often don't get it, for Southern men have the idea that women are a thing apart from ordinary life, and they treat them accordingly, talking about the moon and eyes and things like that."

"Are the Southern men so able to influence their women that they can talk about the moon no matter how much the ladies may hate lunar conversation?"

"Indeed, yes. The Southern man rules the house. Believe me, he does," repeated Betty Lee with emphasis.

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Miss Betty Lee, born in the old South, lover of Northern ways and thought, says South and North must find each other more completely.

"And, you see, he's more capable to than his wife would be. He knows how to deal with situations better than she does, because—well, because he deals with them, I suppose. But she, as I say, must just be sweet and serene. At least, she used to be sweet and serene; now she's up and doing a great deal more."

"The Northern girl thinks she can't learn anything from the girl in the South, though she admits that the Southern girl can glean all sorts of pointers from her. But if the girl up here would just acquire some of the Southern girl's gentleness and refinement and beautiful courtesy she would gain a lot. If I had a daughter, do you know what I'd do? I'd send her South to school, where she could learn just what it means to be a genuine lady. Then I'd bring her back, let her travel and work, and find out how to be a woman. She wouldn't be well rounded. The North and the South oughtn't to be at all strangers to each other. They ought to get together."

"Me? Oh, I'm heading for the musical comedy stage. Now, that's a wicked world for the young girl, I'm told" (she drew down her piquant little face in mock solemnity), "but I'm safe. And that's good old Southern training. You see, Southern ladies don't smoke or drink, or even peep over the danger line. Yes, they flirt, but what's that? Well, anyway, stage stuff is going to be just work and fun for me, and not wickedness and cafes and fat, rich men. Oh, no, I don't mind if my men friends drink; Southern men do. And I don't object if a girl at the same table has her little gold-tipped ones; I admire her graceful pose as she smokes. But as for me, well, I simply couldn't get away with it; I'd put the lighted end in, sure."

"Oh, you see, there's some advantage in being a Southerner born and bred. But also there's the advantage of being a Northerner by naturalization. I'm both, thank heaven! And if that Southern girl of once-upon-a-time does stay down there still just beaming, why, let her, I say. But I'm for the North, heart and soul."

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